

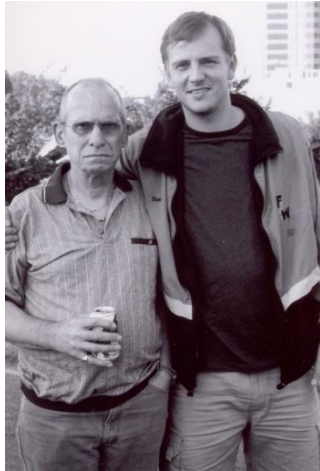
Seventeen

Date line: July 2004

Do you have a favorite number? One that you would always write down first on your lotto ticket? One that would come to mind when asked to guess? I do. Actually I have two such numbers that seem to prey on my mind – I guess I couldn't make up my mind on just one. Those numbers? 17 and 21.

So what. So what? Well... This last 14th of July marked the seventeenth anniversary of Salle Pouv. That's pretty fantastic, considering that I've worked in restaurants and retail outlets that never came close to staying open that long. And a fencing salle? A place known for NOT remaining solvent longer than a season or two, at the most? That's really fantastic...

But of course, Salle Pouv would never have lasted this long without the support of so many people, so many fencers, recreational or competitive, and their families; it would never have seen the light of day without the faith of Matthew and Fred over at American Fencers who trusted me for the scoring machines and some (actually a lot) of the equipment purchases we made; we would never have been able to stay open as promised for our scheduled lessons had it not been for a couple of generous souls who actually lent me their car while mine was in the shop (I never even had to ask!) How about Oscar getting Gary and me together so that I may cash in on some extra lessons? How about Gary helping me get the teaching job at Austin Community College? How about being asked to coach the Tamu club in College Station (thank you, Greg); isn't that a fantastic array of fantastics? Was Someone looking out for me or what?



But the amazing aspects of Salle Pouv's life do not stop there. It is a known fact that it is a lucky coach – in any sport – who can brag of having had the privilege of training ONE star in his entire career; I have had two, maybe three, AND a student who understands fencing enough to be able to teach it long after I drop my last foil. Sean, of course was my first star; he started with Gary and me in 1987 at the age of 11; at the age of 20, he succeeded in achieving the rank of alternate in foil for the 1996 Olympics. Had it not been for a sprained wrist and a bum ankle... Who knows? Sean is also the only American fencer to win the National Championship in both Foil and Epee – the same week-end; and he did it twice: the first time as a Cadet, the second time as a Senior where it counts. To-day, Sean is coaching somewhere in the New York area and is letting his charges pick his brain the way he picked mine, only probably not at 2 a.m....

Cassidy was my second star; she started taking lessons at the age of nine, a long time ago, because she "despised" (her term, not mine) dancing. And the rest is history. No one else, I don't think, qualified for more World Championships before the age of 20 than Cassidy. She never was the deadly, calculating fencer that Sean was: she is all speed and instinct, but for all that almost as coachable as Sean. She now attends Columbia in New York and keeps very busy both in class and on the strip. We wish her all the luck.

Sherice could have been a star as well; she was – last time we saw her – strong and fast and accurate; she could easily have made a place for herself among the likes of Tamara, Lesley, etc., except for one thing: she fenced not for the gold but for the scholarship; she got her wish and was accepted at Ohio State; what happened after that, we can only speculate... Some you win, some you don't.

And then, there was Jason. Jason was special: while every fencer in the place (Jowers Center, San Marcos) was warming up, Jason was using the blackboard to draw a dragon poised for flight; if I knew he really needed this next victory, I would tell him the other guy had said that all bats were vampires; if we went to lunch with him, we never sat directly across from him lest one wanted to be the target of his spilled/splashed 32-oz drink. On the strip, no one took him seriously; but even Augie, the top foil fencer in the section at the time, was unable to get through

Jason's counter-of-quarte and when Jason finally got his B, it was after defeating Augie not once, but twice in the same tournament. Now Jason has grown a beard and is busy designing graphics for computer games; and the pay's not bad.

Many, many people came through the doors (I wish I could say "portals" but they were just humble doors) of Salle Puj: Ben, of the almost non-existent torso, who got his B in his first year, my sister Chris and her buddy Florence who for a while haunted the local Women's Foil finals, Jason's mother Carolyn who kept knocking on the door to those finals along with Sioux of the motorcycle fame, Michael of Alaska, our deadly foil-epée left-hander, Hans with a temper that was probably caused by the fact that he rooted for the Oilers when the Cowboys were winning, and of course, Chris, our first A Epee fencer, his sister Kat, and Edward, and Amy and Phillip and Travis and Luciano and, way before their time, Graham who lived such a happy albeit short life...

And Deena, the salle marm, who has been sparing me the effort of keeping the kids straight and the place clean... Well, almost.

And Meredith, our Web Goddess, who honored me by putting pictures of her child on display on our website.

And Helen's children, and my son John and grandson Christian; I'm sure I could have made fencers out of them... eventually.

And along with all our fencers, some of whom I overlooked, there came Neil; Neil the student of fencing, the asker of why, the one pupil with whom teaching truly became a two-way street; Neil the unreliable, the responsible, Neil the teacher par excellence, my surrogate son to whom I will gladly leave my foil when the time comes.

Those seventeen years witnessed many rule changes: the foil swivel, abolished in 1988 and recalled this year; the sabre fleche, abolished 5 years ago and soon to be recalled? And the foil flick temporarily (?) outlawed in 2004 and welcome back in ___?

These rule changes along with the way they're being interpreted by our refs are enough to drive a coach (or two, or three) crazy. My favorite of course is the rule which allows coaches to talk to their fencers while they bout, coupled with that which prevents the coaches to come near their fencers. Whaddaya gonna do.

All in all, it's been a tough but rewarding seventeen years and, as the young lady who got to admire the Bicentennial celebration in New York said, "I can't wait for the next one!"